

Portuguese Looking to Organics

By Maria do Monte Gomes

Organic olive trees, pastures, cereals and vineyards are popping up in Portugal, particularly in the eastern part of the country, which has less development and pollution than regions along the coast. Since 1998, organic farming in Portugal has tripled in total area. In 1993, Portugal had 73 registered organic producers. By 2002, the number had jumped to 1,059.

Niche Market

Still, Portuguese consumption of organic foods accounts for less than 1 percent of the total food market. Because marketing initiatives are almost nonexistent, consumers lack awareness of organic foods. High prices also constrain consumption, as does the perishable nature of many fresh organic products. Despite all this, there are growing niche markets for organic food products in Portugal.

Organic foods are found in Portuguese supermarkets and hypermarkets, where products are clearly identified as "organic." More and more fresh produce markets now stock organic items, and some producers even offer direct home delivery. However, market structure and distribution channels are not well developed for organic products.

Organic Imports

Portuguese organic food imports are difficult to quantify precisely, since the country's trade data does not separate organic from non-organic products. While still small, the prospects for an

expanded market for organic products in Portugal are real. Supply is less than demand, reflecting the fact that organic farming is still at the initial stage. The Portuguese are growing more conscious of health and environment, which explains their rising interest in organics, especially natural fruit and fibers. Increasing purchasing power also encourages this development.

Portugal imports some organic food products, primarily from other EU (European Union) countries. These imports are mainly fruits and vegetables, but also include meats, dairy products and eggs.

U.S. organic food products with the best prospects include pasta, breakfast cereals and other grains, sauces, dairy products, meats and eggs.

In order to bring in U.S. organic food products, Portuguese importers must work through the Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture to obtain import authoriza-

tion. The Ministry grants authorizations on a case-by-case basis. The importer must demonstrate that the product was produced according to EU organic standards. For U.S. organic products, Portuguese authorities recognize USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service organic certification designations. ■

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